

## REVIEWS AND PUBLICATIONS

### Review

Peter Crawford, *Nomads of the Wind: A Natural History of Polynesia*. BBC Books, 1993. BBC Enterprises Limited, Woodlands, 80 Wood Lane, London W12 0TT. Hardcover, 264 pages; Glossary, bibliography and index. 136 color plates plus several early etchings, maps. Quality production. ISBN 0563 36707 5. £18.99.

Georgia Lee, Ph.D.

*Nomads of the Wind* accompanies the BBC television series of the same name-- and both tell the story of the world of the Polynesians. This beautifully illustrated book traces origins and voyages of discovery; it describes the relationship between the people and the islands upon which they settled. It focuses strongly on the natural history of the area and how, in the face of all odds, plants, birds, and other fauna managed to reach them in the first place.

The first two chapters deal with Tahiti--the "heart of the Polynesian Triangle." Using Tahiti as a key example of Polynesian society, the author includes information on everything from status concerns to how food was prepared; from crops to religion, and how the first arrivals changed the environment. And then the impact of the Western world.

Chapters 3 and 4 concern the islands of Fiji, Samoa and Tonga and Lapita beginnings. Crawford aptly describes these islands as "cradles of Polynesia" and stepping stones for the fauna and flora that have found their way from points farther west.

Polynesian sailing is outlined in Chapter 5, from which the book and the series takes their name: *Nomads of the Wind*. The human movement from west to east, wind patterns, and sailing techniques are all discussed, as is the dispersal of plants, animals, insects and birds into new island groups.

"Burning their Boats," Chapter 6, uses the analogy of the burning of the *Bounty* to illustrate various plants and animals which, by natural selection and isolation, have evolved to the point where they can no longer move from island to island. Examples are included from Rarotonga, Pitcairn, and Henderson.

"The Land of Man," Chapter 7, is about the Marquesas Islands and the role that island group played as the jumping off place for Hawai'i and Easter Island. In the chapter on Easter Island (Chapter 8), Crawford gives us a concise history of Rapa Nui and how the island was affected by its isolated location as well as by human settlement.

Chapters 9 and 10 deal with Hawai'i and New Zealand respectively. The final chapter, "The Pierced Sky", is a short summing-up and a warning for the future. Crawford concludes by saying, prophetically, that the most endangered species in Polynesia may now be the Polynesian. The book's message is ecological: from the original consumption of flightless birds and over-harvesting of plants and other resources by the Polynesian settlers to later exploitation by Europeans. Little by little the face of these islands has

changed and now we may be facing further losses, the demise of the distinctive cultural heritage of the Polynesians.

Books on Polynesia usually focus on the human element only. *Nomads of the Wind* is an exception, for it discusses in depth the plants and animals that also migrated to the east across vast ocean expanses and how they evolved to take advantage of a new homeland.

The Bottom Line: *Nomads of the Wind* is clearly written, readable and enjoyable. The illustrations run the gamut from great to breathtaking. There is something here for everyone--whether the interest is history or prehistory, plants or animals. I recommend it.

### Review

In Pursuit of the Ordinary: Comment on Wilfred Schuhmacher's, "Easter Island as an object of economic anthropology"

Review by Grant McCall, Ph.D.

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W. Wilfried Schuhmacher, 1991. "Easter Island as an object of economic anthropology" in Volume 29 (N° 90) of *Revue europeenne des sciences sociales*. Geneva, Switzerland.

Rapanui, as Easter Islanders call their land and themselves, is indeed a fruitful venue for research in many fields, including economic anthropology, but not quite in the way imagined by W. Wilfred Schuhmacher in his 1991 article, "Easter Island as an object of economic anthropology".<sup>1</sup>

Diffusionist speculations, in particular the resuscitation of the pretty well defunct *American Indians in the Pacific*<sup>2</sup> hypothesis, is not the way to approach the island, for there are far more interesting questions that might be considered. The intention of my commentary, though, is to point out that there is no excuse at the present time for publishing the kinds of inaccurate and misleading information displayed in Schuhmacher. There is a considerable bibliography of sound historical, archaeological, linguistic and anthropological research available in most European languages on Rapanui, with the last two decades, since regular air service commenced, producing many excellent sources.<sup>3</sup>

To begin, his sketch of Inca society, stressing community, the use of food for labor payment and the maintenance of common architecture, is the same for many societies. Apart from the Inca words, the author could be describing any small scale, agrarian culture.<sup>4</sup> However, it is when he ventures into the Rapanui world that the errors start to fly. His word list, alleging culture contact, ignores the Polynesian<sup>5</sup> features of his Rapanui forms, with the exception of *Kumara*, to which I return in a moment.

*Umunga* is a common Rapanui term for any group assembled for a particular project, such as building a house or a boat, or preparing a field for planting. That is, if a relative, or anyone else, comes to work, they should be fed while they do so. If they wish to take cooked food with them

afterwards, they may do that as well. *Umunga* is the nominalised form of *umu*, or oven, roughly “of the oven”, which is the source of cooked food in ancient times. It may derive also from the contraction of *umu anga*. *Umu anga* means literally, “oven work”. As oven stands for cooked food, though, the conceptual and metaphorical referent is clearly the same for both forms. The author is wrong that these concepts are lacking today, or in 1989, during his brief visit.<sup>6</sup>

My own anthropological fieldwork on Rapanui was carried out from 1972 to 1974 and, again, from 1985 to 1986.<sup>7</sup> I gave people *umu anga* and received it during my two stays. It is a term widely known, except perhaps, amongst the Chilean expatriates resident there, who rarely know the vernacular.

*Kura* does have a meaning as “best”, but it means also the feathers of certain birds. The identification of the late prehistoric god, *Makemake*, on Rapanui, with Inca *Kamak* (ancestors) is pure fancy. *Makemake* seems to have been a late development on Rapanui, featured at the ceremonial site of Orongo, and carved on previously erected figures and altars around the island.<sup>8</sup> *Makemake* is represented by a round face, with large eyes and does not seem to have any antecedents in the petroglyph tradition of Rapanui.

The function of the *tupa* on Rapanui, the large stone towers, remains unclear and whilst the Rapanui “T” can have a faint “ch” to it, it may be mere coincidence or part of the *kumara* inheritance, that I mention below.<sup>9</sup>

Finally, in the word list is the supposed identity of Inca *huaca* with Rapanui *ahu*. *Ahu*, meaning “swelling” or “raised place” is a form found throughout Eastern Polynesia<sup>10</sup> and it often refers to the raised area, or sometimes altar, in a public place where group leaders sat and dispensed community justice and advice or officiated at important events. These ceremonial places in Eastern Polynesia are called usually *marae*, that term lacking on Rapanui, except its survival in tradition as part of the name of the place from where the original founding settlers sailed (ie *Marae renga*).<sup>11</sup>

After the word list, the author takes off again in pursuit of the wandering Inca, finding in Rapanui *mata* (really “eye” and “descent group”) a connection with Quechua. Again, there is no need to look in Peru for Polynesia.<sup>12</sup>

Exchange is a fundamental form of human behavior and flourishes in all cultures, the focus being both on material objects and labor. Marcel Mauss’s great insight into similarities between Trobriand *kula* and the northwest coast Indian *potlatch* featured in his landmark volume, *The gift*.<sup>13</sup> His basis for finding similarities was in common human properties, not the diffusionist imperative that obsesses Schuhmacher. Mauss’s remarkable piece of comparative research has had more influence on sociologists and anthropologists than any other single text, although it seems not to have reached Dusseldorf as yet.

Perhaps if Schuhmacher reads Mauss, discovering that exchange of the sort he describes is found throughout the world, he might take it as proof of ancient Andean imperial

domination over the planet!

The sweet potato inheritance that I mentioned above does give me some sympathy for Schuhmacher’s diffusionist line. *Kumara* (sweet potato) are widely dispersed and found throughout Oceania and they definitely are South American in origin. They are known in much of the Pacific by the same term as in Quechua.<sup>14</sup>

In the same way, I think, the tomato, potato and tobacco are widely known today in European languages by their respective Nahuatl and Carib names (see entries in *Oxford English Dictionary*). European explorers went to the Americas, the five hundredth anniversary of which encounter is being commemorated this year (1992), discovered for themselves these products and brought them home, importing the original names with the products themselves. No one suggests that it was Amerindians that came to Europe and brought their products and civilization with them, for the event is historical and recorded. The present centrality of the tomato and potato in various European cuisines (say, Italian and English) does not mean that those civilizations owe anything profound to Aztec or other Amerindian cultures. Schuhmacher surely would not consider a leftover of blood sacrifice the addition of tomato sauce to fried chips in various European countries today! Or that Chinese derived pasta and American originated tomato paste represents a world encircling empire?

In the same way, I think, that it was the Polynesians, the greatest sailors in the history of human kind,<sup>15</sup> who conquered and colonized the world’s largest ocean, who completed their extensive explorations in the first millennium of our era by landing at one or more points in the Americas. Some of these landings may not have survived; others resulted in the acquisition of *kumara*, which cultigen spread throughout the islands as a plentiful and nutritious food source.

In 1986, during a conversation with archaeologist Sergio Rapu, the former Director of the Easter Island Museum and, for a time, Governor, of Rapanui (now with the Polynesian Cultural Centre, Hawai‘i), he developed the concept of “the sweet potato culture”. For Rapanui, the sweet potato is the most common food source; when you have nothing else, you have *kumara*. It is humble, yet nostalgic; no one ever starves on Rapanui.

Rapu’s idea which, now freed of his administrative duties he intends to develop in publication, is that his Rapanui ancestors brought with them a Polynesian pantry, but lacking notably the coconut and the pig. As Rapanui is sub-tropical, it is not the lush paradisaical tourist brochure Polynesia, but a rather harsher environment, where *taro* was grown in stone enclosures (*manavai*) and crops had to be “made to suffer” in order to grow well. The Rapanui put stones on their ancient fields, to protect young plants from the strong winds and to conserve scarce moisture. These features are widely visible to any visitor to the island today, although traditional agriculture, especially during the *moai* complex period, has not been studied well by archaeologists, who most often have

been distracted by the monumental masonry. In 1986, Rapu and I walked some of the large ancient plots, their protective pebbles in place still, even after years of sheep ranch exploitation.<sup>16</sup>

When the Rapanui (or/and other Polynesians) continued their travels and hit South America, some 3,600km distant, they brought back with them the marvelous *kumara*, which grew rapidly in harsh conditions, produced copiously, and provided new nourishment. The *kumara* became the staple of the Rapanui diet, which it remains today. Métraux, researching in the 1930s, but echoing earlier missionary reports, quotes an informant as saying: "Here [on Rapanui] we begin at birth by eating sweet potatoes, then we go on eating sweet potatoes, and finally we die".<sup>17</sup>

Rapanui had brought with them from their Eastern Polynesian origins (perhaps the Marquesas) the social and architectural form, the *ahu*, and they built small ones shortly after their arrival on their new land, in around 400 AD.<sup>18</sup> For the next half millennium, they followed their origins and arranged themselves around their island, at first carving crude figures, as are found in other parts of Polynesia. Around 800 AD<sup>19</sup>, this evolved into the *moai* complex, which really accelerated with the arrival of the *kumara*. The *umunga* worked in gangs, probably of kin, to complete their common task, in rotation.<sup>20</sup> The fuel for this most astounding of Polynesian feats was the humble *kumara*.

Senior archaeologist of Rapanui, the late William Mulloy, in his last publication argued in detail for the gradual development of the civilization there, based upon his two decades of fieldwork and restorations on that singular island. His monograph, with his long-time colleague, Gonzalo Figueroa, demonstrated the development based upon internal principles, of Rapanui.<sup>21</sup>

The weight of evidence by most of the archaeologists who have worked on Rapanui, such as Patrick C. McCoy<sup>22</sup>, William S. Ayres, Claudio Cristino, Patricia Vargas, as well as more recent researchers on rock art (Georgia Lee) and the *moai* (JoAnne van Tilburg) themselves, is compatible with the above outline, rather than the grand diffusionist scheme lurking just under the surface of Schumacher's piece.

Since Rapanui's first contact with Europeans in 1722, on Easter Day, when it received its outsider name, the place has been the subject of the wild surmise, from prehistoric giants, to flying saucers to ancient Amerindian voyagers. In a kind of grand slam, I have seen serious suggestions that Phoenicians teamed with Basques to produce not only Atlantis, but also its Pacific counterpart, Lemuria (or Mu), the sole survival of which sunken place is Rapanui!<sup>23</sup>

The answer to Rapanui's remarkable achievements lies not in the extraordinary, but in the determination of normal humans leading their ordinary lives to produce amazing monuments to the human spirit.<sup>24</sup>

Ask any Pacific Islander: what could be more ordinary and normal than a steaming *kumara*?

<sup>2</sup> Schumacher cites approvingly the most recent, popular work by Thor Heyerdahl, *Easter Island: The Mystery Solved*, London, Souvenir Press, 1989. The original source for these diffusionist speculations derives from his *American Indians in the Pacific*, Stockholm, Forum A. B., 1952, but summarised for easier consumption in his article, "Some problems of aboriginal migration in the Pacific", *Archiv für Völkerkunde*, Beiheft, zu vols. 607, Vienna, 1952.

<sup>3</sup> A bibliography of these titles would number several dozen sound sources, a few of which I discuss in this brief note.

<sup>4</sup> See fuller discussion on exchange and community below.

<sup>5</sup> Schumacher would find useful a perusal of Edward Tregear's, *The Maori-Polynesian comparative dictionary*, first published by Whitcombe and Tombs, Christchurch, in the last century (no date indicated on my copy), but with facsimiles and reprints available.

<sup>6</sup> The authoritative dictionary for Rapanui research was compiled by Father Sebastian Englert, who lived on Rapanui for more than three decades. His 1948 original publication has been re-published by AMS Press, New York. Another frequently used source is Jordi Fuentes, *Diccionario y gramática de la lengua de la Isla de Pascua*, Santiago, Andres Bello, 1960, but the latter must be used with care.

<sup>7</sup> My PhD thesis, *Reaction to Disaster*, was submitted to The Australian National University in 1977; a popular account of my research is in my *Rapanui. Traditional and survival on Easter Island*, Sydney, Allen & Unwin & Honolulu, University Press of Hawaii, 1980. My first fieldwork was financed by The Australian National University, while the second was funded jointly by The University of New South Wales and the Australian Research Council. To all of those institutions I give my thanks for their support.

<sup>8</sup> The definitive source on the rock art of Rapanui is Georgia Lee's PhD thesis, "Easter Island Rock art: Ideological symbols as evidence of socio-political change. PhD dissertation, University of California, Los Angeles, 1986.; She and Alan Davis Drake published a monograph on the Orongo site [*Easter Island: The Ceremonial Center of Orongo*; Easter Island Foundation, 1992]. Research on Orongo and its place in Rapanui prehistory goes back to Katherine Scoresby Routledge, *The Mystery of Easter Island*, London, Sefton, Praed, 1919, or her article, "Survey of the village and carved rocks of Orongo, Easter Island", *Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland*, vol. 50. pp. 425-51. Discussion is in also Alfred Métraux, *Ethnology of Easter Island*, Bishop Museum Bulletin N° 160, Honolulu, 1940.

<sup>9</sup> Claudio Cristino, the former Director of the Easter Island Museum, has carried out extensive survey work on the island and surveyed the known sites. The *Atlas arqueológico de Isla de Pascua*, by Cristino, Patricia Vargas and Roberto Uzaurieta, Easter Island Studies Centre, University of Chile, Santiago, 1981, shows these sites in detail. The main published source on *tupa* remains William Mulloy, "The *Tupa* of Hiramoko", in Thor Heyerdahl and Edwin N. Ferdon, Jr., *Reports of the Norwegian Archaeological*

## Footnotes

<sup>1</sup> Appearing in Volume 29 (N° 90), 1990, pp. 207-8.



*Expedition to Easter Island and the East Pacific*. Vol. 1. Monographs of the School of American Research and Museum of New Mexico, N° 24, Part 1, Santa Fe, New Mexico, 1961.

<sup>10</sup> A good survey source on the archaeology of the Pacific is Peter Bellwood's, *Man's conquest of the Pacific*, Sydney, Collins, 1978.

<sup>11</sup> Tregear *op.cit.*, has a full column on *ahu* and related terms, supporting this meaning. *Marae*, with rather fewer, but more specific, meanings supports the notion of open and sacred space, including a Malay cognate.

<sup>12</sup> *Mata* has eight separate meanings, not unusual with Polynesian polysemy, mostly relating to eye and sight.

<sup>13</sup> The original source for any research on exchange is, of course, Marcel Mauss's, "Essai sur le don: Forme et raison de l'échange dans les sociétés archaïques" in his *Sociologie et anthropologie* (first published in 1923-24 in *L'Année Sociologique*). Paris, Presses Universitaires de France. There are translations in various languages. I wrote a general commentary on exchange theory as "Association and power in reciprocity and requital: More on Mauss and the Maori". *Oceania* Vol. 52. 1981. pp. 303-19. I applied this general understanding of reciprocity to Rapanui in my "Kinship and association in Rapanui reciprocity". *Pacific Studies* Vol. 3 (N° 2, Spring). 1980. pp. 1-21.

<sup>14</sup> Tregear *op.cit.*, provides a number of cognates for the Rapanui *kumara*, including *umala uala*, *kumala*, *kumaa*, with an intriguing note that *kumara* in Fijian is the modern name, the traditional one being *A kawai ni vavalagi*, "the foreigners yam". The most complete source on the characteristics and distribution of the sweet potato is D. E. Yen, *The sweet potato and oceania. An essay in ethnobotany*. Bernice P. Bishop Museum Bulletin 236. Honolulu, Bishop Museum Press. 1974.

<sup>15</sup> A good survey of Polynesian maritime technology is Judi Thompson and Alan Taylor, *Polynesian canoes and navigation*, Laie, Brigham Young University, Hawaii campus, 1980.

<sup>16</sup> The historical development of Rapanui, apart from my own work, has been treated well in J. Douglas Porteous, *The modernization of Easter Island*, Western Geographical Series Volume 19, Department of Geography, University of Victoria, Victoria, B. C., Canada. 1981. Porteous is strong especially on the development of the sheep ranch and how it altered the landscape.

<sup>17</sup> Alfred Métraux, *The ethnology of Easter Island*, Bulletin 160, Honolulu, Bernice P. Bishop Museum, 1940. p. 153.

<sup>18</sup> JoAnne Van Tilburg has summarised the available material on the *moai* and related architecture in her PhD thesis in 1986. She is preparing for publication by the British Museum a summary of this research. An earlier and important PhD thesis on the *ahu* structures themselves is by William S. Ayres, "The cultural context of Easter Island religious structures", Tulane University, 1973. All USA originating theses, incidentally, are easily available from University Microfilms International, with representatives throughout the world.

<sup>19</sup> William Mulloy and Gonzalo Figueroa, "The A Kivi-Vai Teka complex and its relationship to Easter Island architectural prehistory". *Asian and Pacific Archaeology Series*, N° 8. Honolulu, University of Hawaii at Manoa, Social Science Research Institute, 1978.

<sup>20</sup> Based upon an understanding of contemporary Rapanui, and using comparative material, I have suggested a revised view of Rapanui prehistory, including a programme for research on climate change, "Kinship and environment on Easter Island. Some observations and speculations". *Mankind* Vol. 12 (N° 2). 1979. pp. 119-37.

<sup>21</sup> *Op cit.*, note 11.

<sup>22</sup> Patrick Carlton McCoy, "Easter Island settlement patterns in the late prehistoric and protohistoric periods", Unpublished PhD thesis, Washington State University, 1973.

<sup>23</sup> Some of this I discuss humorously for the anniversary of a specialist Basque studies journal in a small review, "Lo pirenaico en lo polinesio?". *Boletín del Instituto de Estudios Vascos* Nr. 100 (1975. pp. 195-9.

<sup>24</sup> A less flattering proposal was made some time ago: that the Rapanui extraordinary development was due to their having nothing else to do and a vigorous social organisation teaming with energy burst into activity. See Marshall D. Sahlins, "Esoteric efflorescence in Easter Island", *American Anthropologist* vol. 57. 1955. pp. 1045-1052.

## Review

### Mowawis on TV

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RNJ readers may recall Steve Fischer's review (4[4], Winter 1990/1, pp. 56-58) of a German television documentary about Easter Island in a series called *Terra-X*. American viewers were presented with a half-hour version some months ago, with a commentary by Hal Douglas. In Britain, however, we have had something a little different.

The *Terra-X* series is currently showing on the Discovery channel of our satellite TV, and we too were presented with the half-hour version--one which, therefore, omits the Rongorongo and Heyerdahl sequences mentioned by Steve's review, but which still contains many of the errors he highlighted. However, the British version has a voice-over by none other than Annie Nightingale, an aging disc-jockey from BBC pop radio: for American readers, this can be equated with having Casey Kasem doing the job! Annie may be an experienced DJ, but, sadly, nobody checked her competence at reading a script about Polynesian archaeology.

As a result, the show is filled with her labored pronunciations of many unfamiliar names and terms, and particularly her references to the statues which she thinks are called "Mowawis" (to rhyme with Malawi). The one consolation is that, unlike in Germany where millions watched, hardly anyone in Britain will have caught this sloppy documentary in its tea time slot on an obscure minority channel.